

Yabloko Has Landslide Win in MT Online Vote

By [Alexey Eremenko](#)

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Parnas co-leader Boris Nemtsov displaying his spoiled ballot on Sunday. **Tatyana Makeyeva**

The social-democratic Yabloko party is winning the State Duma vote with 27.8 percent of the ballots, followed by the liberal Parnas, the Communist Party, United Russia and the nationalists.

This, at least, is the outcome of a hypothetical Duma poll held by The Moscow Times on its web site in the month leading up to the real parliamentary elections Sunday.

The online poll, which attracted several hundred voters, was not limited to the seven parties on the actual ballot and offered a broader menu complete with unregistered or banned but still popular public groups.

Five entrants managed to clear the 7 percent Duma threshold in The Moscow Times poll, though the runner-up was “none of the above” with 15.7 percent.

Parnas was the second most popular party with 11.2 percent of the vote, followed by the Communists (10.7 percent), the likely still-ruling United Russia (9.5 percent) and the banned nationalist Movement Against Illegal Immigration (7.8 percent).

Four registered parties — the Liberal Democrats, Patriots of Russia, the Right Cause and A Just Russia — failed to clear the threshold in the hypothetical poll, as did the unregistered Rot Front, Rodina–Congress of Russian Communities and The Other Russia.

The voting gives Yabloko a total of 186 of the 450 seats in the Duma. Parnas gets 75, the Communist Party — 72, United Russia — 64, and the Movement Against Illegal Immigration — 53.

Representatives of unregistered groups that made it to the “fantasy Duma” all said they would be hypothetically willing to cooperate with each other, even though they would prefer to do so on a case-by-case basis, as opposed to coalitions.

The only outcast would be United Russia, whose legacy, they said, they would hard to dismantle.

“No harm in dreaming,” Yabloko’s Galina Boldyreva said, laughing, when asked to comment on the poll.

Yabloko is already cooperating with the Communists in her native Volgograd, so that would be an obvious though previously unexpected ally, she said by telephone Thursday.

But all opposition groups now need a Mowgli-style “water truce” to withstand the pressure from the ruling party, she said.

Boldyreva said that if her party won, it would immediately get to work with a rollback of health care, utility and educational reforms. She added that Yabloko is the only party seeking to restore the Ecology Ministry, abolished in 2000 by Vladimir Putin, the then-newly installed president. Putin, now prime minister, plans to run for his third presidency in March.

“We’re open to compromise with anyone except ‘the party of crooks and thieves,’” said Parnas co-leader Boris Nemtsov, referring to United Russia by its widely repeated derogative nickname.

He said Parnas could easily find common ground with Yabloko on foreign relations and could even work with nationalists — who are represented in most European legislatures — as long as they “don’t try to jail anyone for their eye color.”

If elected to the Duma, the Movement Against Illegal Immigration would have focused on restoring and defending constitutional freedoms, not on a nationalist agenda, said Alexander Belov, a former leader of the banned group.

Fair media access and absence of political prosecution is all that the nationalists need to peacefully come to power because their ideas are supported by the majority of the populace, Belov said.

“This is a wonderful poll that wholly exposes the degree of inadequacy that plagues Western

media's perception of Russia," said Sergei Markov, senior party member with United Russia.

Western observers, including media and diplomats, see Russian political scene a standoff between pro-Western and neofascist parties, Markov, an outgoing Duma deputy, said by telephone Sunday.

But he said Parnas could not have hoped even for 1 percent of the Duma vote because of its image as "U.S. spies." He conceded that a hypothetical broad coalition of nationalists could have had a chance of sweeping 30 percent of the Duma vote, but only during an economic crisis that makes the public more receptive to populism.

MT Readers' Duma:

Yabloko	27.89 % of the vote	186 seats
None of the Above	15.77 %	-- seats
Parnas	11.27 %	75 seats
Communist Party	10.70 %	75 seats
United Russia	9.58 %	64 seats
Movement Against Illegal Immigration	7.89 %	53 seats

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